

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 1327

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: ELECTION ROUND-UP

REF: BANGKOK 1145

SUMMARY. CABINET MEETING JANUARY 20 "POSTPONED" A FINAL DECISION ON THE PROPOSAL TO LIMIT THE NUMBER OF POLITICAL PARTIES. REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES POSTPONED TO FEBRUARY 9 TO 13. MINISTER ATTACHED TO PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE PRIDA PHATTHANATHABUT PREDICTS DEMOCRATS WILL WIN 87 SEATS AND SOCIAL ACTION PARTY 50 IN APRIL 4 ELECTIONS. DISSIDENT SOCIAL AGRARIANS OFFICIALLY JOIN DEMOCRAT PARTY. END SUMMARY.

1. PRELIMINARY MOVES IN ELECTION CAMPAIGN CONTINUE, WITH MUCH OF ACTIVITY CONCENTRATING ON POLITICAL PARTY CONSOLIDATIONS AND FORMATION OF NEW POLITICAL GROUPS. THERE IS LITTLE PURPOSE IN SEEKING TO FOLLOW THESE DEVELOPMENTS IN DETAIL UNTIL THEY HAVE SETTLED DOWN, AS UPWARDS OF 50 POLITICAL GROUPINGS MAY ULTIMATELY TAKE PART IN ELECTIONS.

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2. LIMIT ON POLITICAL PARTIES - RESPONDING TO PROSPECT OF EVEN LARGER NUMBER OF PARTIES PARTICIPATING IN CAMPAIGN THAN WAS CASE IN 1975 (WHEN 44 PARTIES WERE INVOLVED), CABINET MEETING JANUARY 20 CONSIDERED PROPOSAL TO LIMIT NUMBER OF PARTIES (REFTEL. IN ADDITION TO THE REQUIREMENT CONCERNING CANDIDATES OUTLINED IN REFTEL, A PARTY WHICH WON LESS THAN 10 PER CENT OF THE SEATS (IN THIS CASE 28 SEATS) WOULD BE REQUIRED BY PROPOSAL TO DISSOLVE ITSELF AND ITS MP'S JOIN EXISTING PARTIES. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT HAD INDICATED THAT HE WAS NOT REPEAT NOT PREPARED TO RECOMMEND ROYAL DECREE ON THIS MATTER UNDER SECTION 190 OF CONSTITUTION WITHOUT CABINET BACKING. CABINET REPORTEDLY DID NOT REPEAT NOT SUPPORT PROPOSAL, AND A FINAL DECISION WAS "POSTPONED" FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION.

3. EMBOFF REVIEWED MATTER JANUARY 20 WITH SANSEN KRAICHITTI, CHIEF JUDGE OF CIVIL COURT AND MEMBER OF CONSTITUTION DRAFTING COMMITTEE IN 1974. SANSEN, CLEARLY AN ADVOCATE OF LIMIT ON NUMBER OF POLITICAL PARTIES, RECALLED THAT THIS MATTER HAD COME UP IN COURSE OF DRAFTING CONSTITUTION AND THAT, AT THAT TIME, KHUKRIT AND DEPUTY MINISTER OF INTERIOR PRAKOP PRAYUNPHOKKARAT (BOTH ALSO MEMBERS OF THE CONSTITUTION DRAFTING COMMITTEE), AMONG OTHERS, HAD OPPOSED LIMIT TO NUMBER OF PARTIES AS CONTRARY TO DEMOCRACY. SANSEN ACKNOWLEDGED THAT AN EMERGENCY ROYAL DECREE LIMITING THE PARTIES WOULD SUBSEQUENTLY HAVE TO BE RATIFIED BY PARLIAMENT AFTER APRIL 4 ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, HE SPECULATED THAT THIS WOULD PROBABLY PRESENT FEW PROBLEMS. REJECTION OF A ROYAL DECREE WOULD NOT ONLY BE DIFFICULT STEP FOR PARLIAMENT TO TAKE BUT WOULD ALSO VIOLATE INTEREST OF ELECTED MEMBERS. AS THEY WOULD BE ELECTED IN CAMPAIGN IN WHICH NUMBER OF PARTIES WOULD HAVE BEEN LIMITED, REJECTION OF ROYAL DECREE COULD PLACE IN QUESTION VALIDITY OF WHOLE ELECTION.

4. REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES POSTPONED - A CABINET SPOKESMAN ON JANUARY 20 ANNOUNCED THAT THE REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES FOR THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS HAS BEEN POSTPONED FROM FEBRUARY 2 TO 6 TO FEBRUARY 9 TO 13. THE REASON GIVEN WAS THAT MORE TIME WAS NEEDED BY THE INTERIOR MINISTRY TO PRE-CONFIDENTIAL

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PARE FOR THE ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, OTHER SOURCES INDICATED THAT THE DELAY WAS LINKED TO THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTEMPT TO LIMIT THE NUMBER OF POLITICAL PARTIES.

5. YUWARAT KAMONWET, CHIEF OF THE ELECTION DIVISION OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TOLD REPORTERS THAT THE NEW DATE FOR PRINTING THE BALLOTS WAS FEBRUARY 19. THIS INDICATES THAT THE MINISTRY WILL NOT HAVE THE FINAL LIST OF CANDIDATES

UNTIL FEBRUARY 18.

6. PP'S PREDICTIONS - ACCORDING TO THE JANUARY 20 BANGKOK POST, PRIDA PHATTHANATHABUT, MINISTER ATTACHED TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE AND PEACEFUL PEOPLE'S PARTY MP FROM CHIANG MAI, BOLDLY PREDICTED TO THE PRESS THE OUTCOME OF THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS. HE CLAIMED THAT HIS PREDICTIONS OF THE LAST GENERAL ELECTIONS (JANUARY 75) WERE "NOT FAR OFF THE MARK--EXCEPT FOR THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY WHICH GOT ONLY 18 SEATS WHILE WE HAD EXPECTED IT TO GET 30." HIS PREDICTIONS ARE:

DEMOCRAT	87
SOCIAL ACTION	50
THAI NATION	37
SOCIALIST PARTY OF THAILAND AND SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT	36
SOCIAL JUSTICE	30
NEW FORCE	23
SOCIAL AGRARIAN	14
OTHERS	7

7. PRIDA'S GUESSTIMATES ARE INTERESTING ON THREE POINTS. HE EVIDENTLY BELIEVES THAT THERE WILL BE A REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF PARTIES WHICH WIN SEATS FROM THE PRESENT 23 TO AT MOST 14 PARTIES AND THE NUMBER OF "UNDER 10" PARTIES AT LEAST HALVED FROM 14 TO 7. HE ALSO IS MORE OPTIMISTIC ON THE CHANCES OF THE SOCIALIST PARTIES THAN OTHERS WHO HAVE TALKED TO EMBASSY OFFICERS. THESE POLITICIANS ALMOST UNIVERSALLY EXPECT THE SOCIALISTS TO LOSE, NOT GAIN GROUND. (MANY OBSERVERS DO NOT REPEAT NOT CONSIDER NEW FORCE PARTY TO BE "SOCIALIST" IN ANY REAL SENSE.)
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PRIDA'S PREDICTION OF DEMOCRAT STRENGTH COINCIDES WITH WHAT DR. KAMON SOMWICHIAN, DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY, TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS ON JANUARY 20. KAMON PREDICTED A RANGE OF 60 TO 100 DEMOCRAT MP'S IN THE NEXT PARLIAMENT AND SAID THAT THE DEMOCRATS ARE AIMING FOR 80 TO 90.

8. ON JANUARY 20 THE DISSIDENT SOCIAL AGRARIANS, LED BY FORMER PARTY LEADER SAWET PIAMPHONGSAN, OFFICIALLY JOINED THE DEMOCRAT PARTY. DR. KAMON SONWICHIAN TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS ON JANUARY 20 THAT SAWET WOULD BRING IN THE OTHER EIGHT MP'S WHO DECIDED AGAINST JOINING THE KHUKRIT COALITION ON JANUARY 8 AS WELL AS ABOUT 15 OTHER FORMAL SOCIAL AGRARIANS WHO HAD LOST IN THE GENERAL ELECTIONS OF 1975 BUT WHO HAD COME IN A CLOSE SECOND.

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